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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Concluding observations on the initial periodic report of Qatar

Addendum

Information provided by Qatar in follow-up to the concluding observations*

[Date received: 20 July 2016]

Note: The present document is being issued in Arabic, English, French and Spanish only.

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

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28. **The Committee calls upon the State party:**

(a) **To take immediate measures, in view of the upcoming Advisory Council elections, to ensure that at least 30 per cent of the members appointed to the Shura (Advisory) Council are women;**

(b) **To adopt and implement further measures, including temporary special measures in the form of quotas, with benchmarks and specific timetables, to increase the number of women in political and public life, at all levels and in all areas, including in the central municipal councils and local government units, in accordance with article 4 (1), of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 on temporary special measures;**

(c) **To take appropriate measures, including the enactment of relevant electoral laws, to ensure that political parties allocate sufficient funding for women campaigning and establish benchmarks with a specific timetable in addition to sanctions, such as fines for political parties in case of non-compliance;**

(d) **To take all measures necessary to remove all barriers to women's participation in the foreign service and to increase the number of women judges, prosecutors and lawyers and ensure the appointment of women to the Supreme Court and to the Court of Appeal;**

(e) **To raise awareness of the importance of women's participation in elections as candidates and voters, with a view to eliminating patriarchal attitudes that deter women's political participation.**

Responses

(b) *To adopt and implement further measures, including temporary special measures in the form of quotas, with benchmarks and specific timetables, to increase the number of women in political and public life, at all levels and in all areas, including in the central municipal councils and local government units, in accordance with article 4 (1), of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 on temporary special measures*

The Qatar National Development Strategy 2011-2016 is the mechanism that systematically translates the Qatar National Vision 2030 into facts on the ground. It identifies programmes and projects to ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for the State of Qatar. Its 14 sector strategies include a strategy for family cohesion and the empowerment of women for 2011-2016. This strategy is aimed at protecting a strong family that enjoys support and social protection, in which women have a strong role in all aspects of life, including participation in economic and social decision-making. The sector strategy identifies eight development outcomes. One of these consists of increasing the empowerment of women by realizing two targets, namely increasing the number of women in leadership positions and establishing a civil society organization to promote women's issues.

The national strategies and plans include targets to promote the provision of services to women in the context of their participation in public life and decision-making. The sector strategy on family cohesion and the empowerment of women for 2011-2016 includes the target of promoting women's participation in decision-making and empowering women to assume leadership positions. Its executive plan

includes a range of projects and programmes for implementation by governmental and non-governmental actors in the country, including the following:

- A project to build the capacity of women to participate in local and parliamentary elections
- A project to increase the proportion of women in leadership positions
- A project to promote the participation of women in civil society institutions
- Participation in political and public life.

Source: Fourth National Human Development Report of Qatar, 2015.

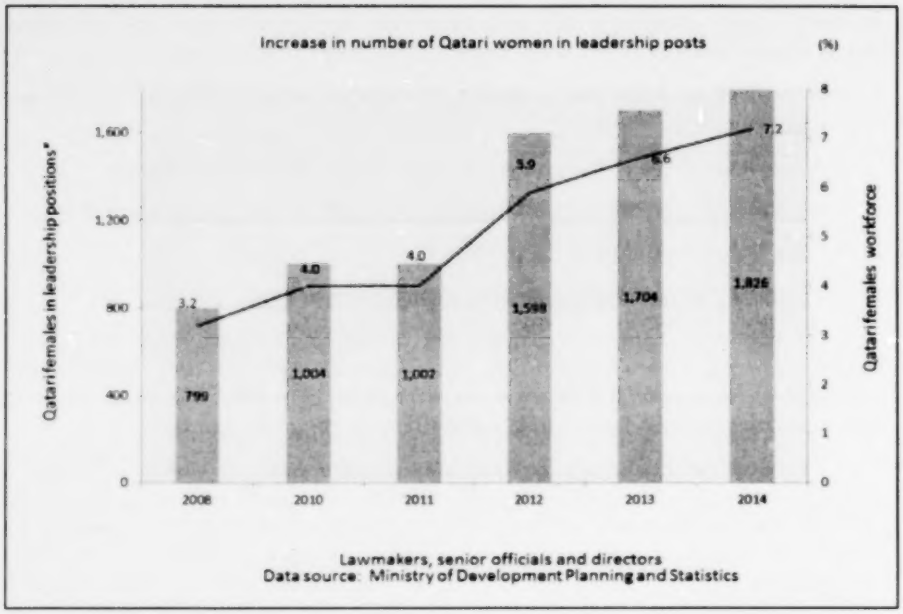
(c) *To take appropriate measures, including the enactment of relevant electoral laws, to ensure that political parties allocate sufficient funding for women campaigning and establish benchmarks with a specific timetable in addition to sanctions, such as fines for political parties in case of non-compliance*

The State of Qatar attaches the utmost importance to women's issues. It supports women's access to leadership positions and participation in the public administration of the State, including the enjoyment of such political rights as the right to vote and stand in both municipal council and Shura Council elections. Legal and procedural rules will be put in place to regulate the process of standing for office in future. Those rules will be consistent with international standards, in particular the international conventions on women ratified by the State of Qatar, and especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

(d) *To take all measures necessary to remove all barriers to women's participation in the foreign service and to increase the number of women judges, prosecutors and lawyers and ensure the appointment of women to the Supreme Court and to the Court of Appeal*

Women's rights are one of the most important core elements for the application of general human rights principles in Qatar. The Government endeavours to ensure that women can exercise all of their rights, and that relevant provisions are incorporated into the Constitution, legislation and regional and international instruments. That principle is essential for the comprehensive realization of sustainable development at all levels. Women have made considerable progress in the diplomatic service since they first joined in 1996. Between 1996 and 2002, 18 women joined the diplomatic service. By 2010, there were 38 women diplomats. That number has now risen to 65 as of 2016. This trend is a testament to the increasing political will to work towards bringing women into the diplomatic service.

The number of women in leadership posts in the public and private sectors has increased by over 100 per cent since the base year of 2008 (see figure below). Women account for 30 per cent of director-level posts in civil society organizations (Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, 2014).



Over the last few years, it has become clear that there is political will to empower Qatari women and promote their voice in Government. As a result, several women have been appointed to decision-making roles. The first female Minister of Education and Higher Education served from 2003 to 2009, and the first female Minister of Health from 2008 to 2009. Qatari women have also served as Minister of Information and Communications Technology, President of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, Deputy President of the Supreme Council for Education and Rector of the University of Qatar. Qatari women are currently in leadership posts as Minister of Health, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Qatar Museums Authority and Chair of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. Numerous women participate on the boards of supreme councils, foundations and Government bodies and are members of the standing committees that formulate policies and strategies, such as the Standing Committee for Population Affairs, as well as of the temporary committees that draft legislation.

Qatari women have held diplomatic posts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In early 2010, a woman was appointed to the rank of ambassador for the first time. In 2011, a woman was appointed Permanent Representative of Qatar in Geneva. In 2013, a female ambassador to Croatia was appointed. Women hold other diplomatic posts in delegations abroad, and are members of numerous international organizations, particularly in the area of human rights and social development, including the following roles:

- United Nations Special Rapporteur on Disability (formerly)
- Special Envoy of the League of Arab States for Humanitarian Relief
- Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (formerly)
- Member of the international Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (formerly)

• Member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

As of 2011, women accounted for some 13.7 per cent of Qatari lawyers. That proportion is encouraging; the first woman to join the profession did so only in 2000. In 2010, women entered the judiciary and public prosecutor's office, and they play a visible role in several departments of the Ministry of the Interior, including the Department of Traffic and Patrols and the Department of Passports.

Qataris working as prosecutors, judges, judges' assistants and lawyers, disaggregated by sex

		2009		*2010*		*2011*	
	Profession	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*
1	Prosecutors	2	62	3	96	3	78
2	Judges	0	97	2	103	2	200
3	Lawyers	14	84	18	99	17	107

(e) *To raise awareness of the importance of women's participation in elections as candidates and voters, with a view to eliminating patriarchal attitudes that deter women's political participation*

The State of Qatar attaches great importance to awareness-raising, with a particular focus on women, in order to foster participation in public and political life. In 2015, the competent departments within the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs implemented 27 awareness-raising programmes in places where women meet, such as the Qatar Charity hall, independent schools and the Katara assembly hall.

A training and awareness-raising programme entitled Women Leaders has been held. It was attended by 82 trainees from various Government agencies and formed part of a training and awareness-raising programme entitled My Family — My Life, which took place at an independent school and at the Qatar National Theatre. Another programme, addressing the role of values in confronting family and tribal conflict, was held in several phases. Other programmes include the Be Gentle With Women programme, Women Leaders programmes held in various parts of the country, and the Equality: How, When and Where programme.

The competent departments have created four awareness-raising commercials on women leaders and six street signs. They have taken part in five conferences on encouraging women to engage in public and political life.

The State of Qatar has worked to create an appropriate environment for Qatari women to engage in public and political life by increasing the number of nurseries to 133 by the end of 2015, and providing access to all forms of educational and health services. Those measures have increased the public and political participation of Qatari women, as pointed out in paragraphs (a) and (d).

38. **Recalling its general recommendation No. 26 on women migrant workers, the Committee calls upon the State party:**

(a) To adopt a law on domestic workers and amend the Labour Code of 2004 to ensure that it protects domestic workers along with other categories of workers;

(b) To take immediate steps to abolish the sponsorship system, repeal provisions setting criminal penalties for absconding and seek technical assistance from ILO whenever necessary;

(c) To put in place labour inspections at places of work where migrant workers, including domestic workers, have complained about violations; systematically investigate all allegations of exploitation, abuse and violence against migrant domestic workers; and prosecute and adequately punish abusive or exploitative employers and agents;

(d) To monitor employers' compliance with article 9 of the Sponsorship Law requiring them to return passports to migrant workers, and penalize employers and recruiters who violate this provision;

(e) To ensure that women migrant workers enjoy effective access to legal aid and complaint mechanisms, and provide immediate access to shelters and rehabilitation services for women migrant workers alleging abuse and exploitation;

(f) To consider ratifying the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) of ILO.

Responses

38. *Recalling its general recommendation No. 26 on women migrant workers, the Committee calls upon the State party: (a) To adopt a law on domestic workers and amend the Labour Code of 2004 to ensure that it protects domestic workers along with other categories of workers*

The State of Qatar recognizes the need to review recruitment and labour regulations for domestic workers to keep up with domestic developments, the needs of citizens in that category of workers, and recent international developments, notably the Convention concerning decent work for domestic workers and the supplementary Recommendation adopted during the 100th session of the International Labour Conference held in May 2011.

A draft law on domestic workers — in line with the Convention and international labour standards — is currently being considered and is undergoing legislative procedures.

As regards the rules currently governing the employment of domestic workers, that category is outside the scope of the Labour Code but is subject to the provisions of the Civil Code. Contractual relationships with employers are regulated by model contracts annexed to bilateral agreements signed between the State of Qatar and the workers' States of origin.

Even though domestic employees are not subject to the Qatari Labour Code, the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs must approve their contracts with a view to ensuring that their contractual rights are protected. The Ministry monitors recruitment offices and conducts periodic surprise inspections to make sure that workers are not being exploited and that their rights

are being protected. Several such offices have been closed owing to violations of the Labour Code and of the ministerial decision regulating their operation.

(b) *To take immediate steps to abolish the sponsorship system, repeal provisions setting criminal penalties for absconding and seek technical assistance from ILO whenever necessary*

Law No. 21 (2015) regulating the entry, exit and residence of migrant workers, adopted on 27 October 2015, abolished the sponsorship system and replaced it with employment contracts. It also replaced the term "master" (*rabb al-amal*) with the term "employer" (*sahib al-amal*). The new law allows migrant workers to transfer to another employer after the end of a fixed-term contract. Under article 40 of the Labour Code, the maximum length for a fixed-term contract is five years. In the case of open-ended contracts, the law allows the migrant worker to move on to a new employer five years after being hired.

The law also abolishes the requirement to obtain permission to leave the country. A worker may apply for an exit visa from the relevant government agency without going through the employer.

The law will enter into force and begin to be enforced one year after the date of its publication in the *Official Gazette*. It was published in issue No. 19 (2015) on 13 December 2015.

With regard to seeking assistance from the International Labour Organization (ILO), the State of Qatar currently has a technical cooperation project with ILO, which includes cooperation on issues relating to protection of workers' rights.

(c) *To put in place labour inspections at places of work where migrant workers, including domestic workers, have complained about violations; systematically investigate all allegations of exploitation, abuse and violence against migrant domestic workers; and prosecute and adequately punish abusive or exploitative employers and agents*

The State of Qatar devotes great attention to labour inspection in order to make sure that laws protecting workers in the State are enforced. The number of labour inspectors has grown markedly and now stands at 294. That increase has been necessary owing to the rise in the number of companies and facilities subject to inspection, which in turn is due to the rapidly growing economy and a concomitant growth in construction activity and investment projects.

The State is constantly taking steps to make inspections more effective, something that has significantly raised the profile of labour inspection at the Ministry and allowed the Department of Labour Inspection to expand its geographic reach.

With a view to increasing the effectiveness of labour inspections and ensuring that inspectors carry out their tasks as thoroughly as possible, inspectors are provided with modern hand-held devices that allow them to enter information and send reports directly from inspection sites. That has considerably reduced expenditure of time and effort compared to previously, when inspectors had to enter data and write reports by hand after returning to the office. With the new technology, the inspector can now travel to several workplaces and enter information and send reports directly from the inspection sites. We are currently

coordinating with the relevant labour agencies to link the devices to a map grid of the country with a view to expediting travel to inspection sites.

The following table shows figures for inspections according to type of visit and result for the year 2015:

Type and outcome of inspection	*Worker conditions*	*Health and safety*	*Total visits*
Acceptable	23 768	11 799	35 567
Notification to cease violation	11 419	8 458	19 877
Warning	731	177	908
Citation	318	342	660
Total inspections	36 236	20 776	57 012
Number of sites visited	23 652	4 471	

(d) *To monitor employers' compliance with article 9 of the Sponsorship Law requiring them to return passports to migrant workers, and penalize employers and recruiters who violate this provision*

Article 8 of Law No. 21 of 2015 regulating the entry, exit and residence of migrant workers requires an employer to return a worker's passport to the worker upon completion of residency or renewal procedures.

Article 39 of that law criminalizes withholding a migrant worker's passport and imposes a fine of up to QAR 25,000 on employers in violation.

Ministerial Decision No. 18 of 2014 sets conditions and specifications for appropriate housing for migrant workers. It requires that assigned lockers should be provided at secure locations freely accessible to migrant workers to store their documents and personal effects, including their passports.

At the practical level, the Ministry of the Interior coordinates with the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs to ensure that workers' passports are not withheld.

In 2015, the Human Rights Department of the Ministry of the Interior received 168 complaints about passports being withheld, all of which were referred to the Public Prosecutor for action.

(e) *To ensure that women migrant workers enjoy effective access to legal aid and complaint mechanisms, and provide immediate access to shelters and rehabilitation services for women migrant workers alleging abuse and exploitation*

Qatar has a well-functioning, effective and accessible mechanism to handle complaints from migrant workers. Complaints are resolved between employer and worker through the competent authorities.

Even though the category of domestic workers is not covered by the Labour Code, the Complaints Section of the Human Rights Department of the Ministry of the Interior makes every effort to provide guidance and direction to complainants and to inform them of available legal recourse — whether through administrative agencies or the courts — to obtain their entitlements and secure their rights.

On a separate front, the Department of Public Relations and the Department of Passports and Migrant Worker Affairs are in contact with expatriate communities to inform them of the rights of their members who are migrant workers under the Labour Code and the Law regulating their entry, exit, residence and sponsorship. In addition, community police departments are in contact with company executive officers about their obligation to protect the rights of migrant workers as part of their corporate social responsibilities.

In addition, the National Human Rights Commission is doing its part by receiving complaints from this category of workers, responding to them in coordination with the relevant agencies, and ensuring that such workers' rights are respected.

The Government has established an office in the courts, under the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs, to lend a helping hand to workers wishing to bring suit against their employers to fulfil their rights. It offers legal assistance and provides interpreters in the languages most commonly spoken among migrant workers in the State. No fees are charged to the migrant workers.

(f) *To consider ratifying the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) of ILO*

As noted above, the State is currently considering a draft law on domestic workers that is in line with the Convention and international labour standards. The draft law is currently undergoing legislative procedures. After the law is adopted, consideration will be given to the advisability of ratifying the Convention.